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ABSTRACT

Learning outside the school has implications for students and teachers as they reach beyond the limited sphere of the classroom. Students should see connections between academic subjects and work, develop insights into the community, develop independence, work with adults other than their teachers and parents, view possible career areas, function separately from their peer group, develop a sound self-image, learn the practical techniques of applying for a job, and finally, could become acquainted with people deeply involved in a given profession. Teachers can reconsider their attitudes and approaches to teaching, obtain a better knowledge of community resources, be reminded of the need to relate subject matter to the real world, and guide learning activities rather than be the center of the learning situation. Beneficial byproducts of a program outside the school could also be the improvement of the school's image with the community and the opportunity for teachers, parents, and community members to relate to and see each other in a different light. (Author/MLF)

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Learning Outside the School Building--Of Course!

by Karl V. Hertz

The potential for learning outside the school building has always loomed before us. Its significance has been a source of wonderment for teachers in a one room schoolhouse and for men and women teaching in large schools in metropolitan areas. The notion as to why this rich source of learning has not been tapped can be attributed to many factors. However, the concern here is to look at a philosophy that encourages the activity of students beyond their school building and then to go even further and examine the goals and benefits for students and teachers as they reach beyond the limited sphere of the classroom. There will be concern for the manner in which an administrator can aid the teachers and encourage his staff along the path to outside learning. Finally, we will touch upon some rather beneficial by-products of such programs.

Before launching into a discussion of learning outside of the school, I should mention that it is essential that the administrator believe in such projects himself. These projects take time and effort, and like all curriculum change, they must be approached with conviction, or the strength will certainly wane before completion of the project.

It should be made clear at this point that I am not talking about how to implement a full blown work-study program, but the focus of interest is how to encourage and bring about learning outside the school which is closely connected and integrated with academic subjects. In a very real sense, we are looking at first steps.

EA 006 046

What are our goals or objectives for the students as we attempt to broaden their learning experiences? One might put these points in any order, but the first one in my mind is that hopefully the students will begin to see real connections between the academic subjects they study in school and the jobs that people are doing daily. Too often, young people see their courses as hurdles which they must jump to gain the way of life they want. Through these trips away from school, the student may, for instance, start to see the connection between his work with geometry and a career in architecture.

Second, they will hopefully develop insights into the community in general. Very often the students become aware of the service and work of people they had never thought about.

The third area would be the development of independence. It is a fine opportunity for a student to start doing a job or project on his own. Just the entire matter of organizing or planning a project takes time, thought, and effort. The student has to make contacts outside of school, plan his program, see that he gets there on time, fulfill the expectations of the people he has enlisted to help him, and conclude by evaluating what was achieved by the effort.

Fourth, many of our students have not really had to work with adults other than their teachers and parents. Such contacts with people in business and professional areas can be very helpful to a young person. We should realize that many of them have not had the chances to really get out and earn money and satisfy an employer as we may have done as young people. Even if these exposures through school do not provide actual work experience, they do give the student the chance to view the work setting.

Certainly a fifth advantage is the chance to view possible career areas. Many young persons think they have some notion of what they would like to do in life, but we all know that many of us end up doing work whic we never could have dreamed we would be doing in later life. Each experience that takes them beyond the school walls provides the young person with another chance to see a life work which they may not have considered. That is an important part of their education if we can help them to determine the line of work they would like to do for thirty or forty years.

Sixth, if the time away from school is planned for individual students it gives the person a chance to function separately from his peer group. All of us know how important fellow students are to young people. It is equally important for many of them that they have a chance to try their skills at working away from their peers. This is true partly because some of them function very poorly with people their own age, but quite well with older people; for a student to have such a feeling could be a great help to his or her development.

This fits very closely to the next point which is the development of a sound self-image. Some young people, despite their loudness and often pushy manner, do not have a very sound self-perception. Early efforts in such projects as we are referring to have shown that students do have a better image of themselves after getting out on their own.

The eighth goal for students in an outside project, especially the type they develop for themselves and not a group, involves the practical techniques of applying for a job. For many students who come to school daily looking rather shoddy, the experience of moving into the "working community" is something of a culture shock. These young people often need

to be coached by their parents or teachers on how to dress, what to say, the value of being on time, and the importance of being prepared to discuss what they are there for.

It is clear as these students go into the community that the responsibility for their success or failure is closely connected to their performance. There is an element of stress, but for most young people, they relish the chance to prove themselves and eagerly are attracted to situations where they can show their capability.

Finally, the student, again if he is working at something on an individual basis, may get to know people deeply involved in a given profession. This may prove to be an especially beneficial part of the project. It gives the student a chance to really get a close feeling for a person and a feeling for the way that person relates to his work.

If one accepts the points that have been made here as beneficial for students, then the next consideration might well be the benefits that a teacher could experience from participation in such projects. One thing that certainly occurs is that the teacher gives deep thought to his or her attitudes and approaches to teaching. This would be especially true in the case of a teacher who is wedded to the teacher centered classroom. Such a person will often resist such efforts as this; it may well pose a threat to them as individuals, and act as a challenge to their entire approach to teaching. The administrator will often have to provide extensive reinforcement to such people. It is, however, often quite rewarding to see people, who are set in their ways, change. They may very well make great use of the new dimension once they have had the opportunity to internalize it.

The second feature for teachers would be that they often obtain a much better knowledge of community resources. In some cases, they are quickly recognized as community leaders and are drawn into community activities which actually prove beneficial to students. It is in a sense a snowball effect; one good learning situation leads to another.

Third, the teacher is reminded of the need to relate his subject matter to the real world. Often it is easy for teachers to slip into the trap of thinking that their subject is taught just for its own inner value. That, of course, may be the case on the graduate level, but it is rarely true for the high school student.

Having teachers thinking in terms of outside projects also puts the teacher in a role where he guides learning activities rather than being the center of the learning situation. As we work toward any sense of individualized instruction or continuous progress, it is important that teachers be given ways in which they may move gracefully away from the center of attention in the classroom.

With the above points in mind, it becomes clear that the teacher must find new ways of evaluating his work and the work of the students. The rethinking process on evaluation may well be the source of new ideas.

Now the question arises as to how an administrator might bring this process about. The first step is for the principal to clearly be comfortable with the entire idea. This is especially important since there are many real and subtle barriers which administrators may put in the path of programs which must take place outside the school.

A principal might start by merely saying at the beginning of the year that he would like to see such projects taking place. At the same time he would be well advised to express some of his thoughts on how such exposures outside the school could benefit both students and teachers. It would be especially helpful if the principal had an experienced well thought of teacher who was ready and willing to initiate such projects. The word spreads rapidly throughout a school when something is being done very well or very poorly. For this reason, it is a good idea to have the first attempts at any such new project as this well organized from the beginning, and if a "well thought of old hand" on the faculty is doing the project, it gives credence to its success.

A next step might be to have counselors sending senior students on trips to colleges to find out more about where they would like to be continuing their education. These trips take sound co-ordination between the school and the colleges, but it is well worth the effort. Then one subject area, such as social studies, might well incorporate a series of visits to community organizations as an integral part of its curriculum. The students would plan to spend one day each week out in the community for a semester. Again, planning is essential. It takes time to be sure the visits have meaning in relation to the rest of the course; the agencies must be contacted and encouraged to have people and programs ready to be seen, and there is always transportation to be planned. To lend even more emphasis to the school's concern for the students being on outside projects, it could be planned that the entire school have a day or series of days away from school. (Obviously, this becomes more difficult the larger the school is.)

The phases that have been mentioned to this point might take place over a couple of years. At that time, the school might be ready for a month long project for seniors during the last month of the year. They could be encouraged to plan a project, submit it through a faculty committee, get it cleared by their parents, contact the people that they would work with, and plan the manner in which they would report back to the school on how the project had gone and what they had achieved.

Ultimately, one might expect such movement in a school to culminate after a few years in an entire semester being spent outside the school with professional staff members devoting time to preparation for this semester, direct involvement in it, and follow up to the project. Such a semester long project has been described and developed by Jan Rakoff at Harvard. He says the goals of such a program are "to provide an effective and efficient approach to career exploration and to provide a means for students to acquire insight into significant social settings and dynamics which lie outside their range of experience."

It is clear that a school would normally find it quite difficult to just jump into a month long or semester long project. The shock to the school would be great, and the teachers and students would not likely be ready to take advantage of the educational opportunity which they have before them. It might also be worthwhile to note at this point that the administrator has an obligation to find a reasonably happy middle point between putting all kinds of red tape in the way of these projects and the other extreme where he may not have any idea whether there are any benefits being registered through the projects. To find the middle ground where there is accountability and flexibility is a valuable asset in achieving success.

The process of developing appropriate places for students to go outside the school can be done in a number of ways. As a starting point, it is important that the teachers who are actually doing the planning have some notion of where they would like to have their students going. Parents are a sound source of locations that students may attend. Their work may well provide a number of fine possibilities.

Service clubs often have people from a variety of backgrounds who are more than willing to have young people know what they are doing. Such organizations are often made up of people interested in civic projects who will be able to suggest some interesting possibilities. City offices, hospitals, service agencies, and professional organizations all can suggest some interesting possibilities, and it is good to remember that it is best to let some of these groups suggest to you the possibilities that exist within their work area. They most likely have some ideas that you have not thought of. In a sense, you are striving for a smorgasbord of possibilities from which teachers and students may pick. The list will grow as the years pass, and you will discard unsatisfactory locations which will contribute to an ever increasing quality of possibilities.

Finally, I might suggest some beneficial by-products for such a program outside the school. The school's image with the community is furthered by the young people who go out to be a part of their community. A second factor is the chance that students, teachers, and people in the community have to relate to and see each other in a different light. Parents are often involved in these projects even if it is only to provide transportation, but they always are amazed at the things that they are exposed to in the community through their children, and so it seems the educational aspect of the trips even extends beyond the students to the

parents and into the community organizations that accept them.

Henry Adams said in 1907 in his book The Education of Henry Adams that, "Nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts." We might hope that through such programs as we are describing today we may be able to reduce the number of inert facts that students are expected to learn. I think we as educators would be relieved at such a prospect, and it is clear that Henry Adams would be much more comfortable with our approach to education.